

# GreenCOM Update

A quarterly report from USAID's Environmental Education & Communication Project ♦ July 1998

## Environmental Curriculum Designed in Mali

Denise Mortimer

Saharan sands are steadily encroaching on arable land in Mali. Since most Malians depend on subsistence farming, desertification translates into an immediate threat to survival and an urgent need for environmental education.

To help meet this need, GreenCOM sponsored a participatory workshop on elementary school environmental education. GreenCOM resident advisor Richard Grieser and technical assistant Albert Ndayitwayeko led the seminar in Sikasso, May 27 to June 3. Seventeen teachers and administrators attended and produced a teacher's guide to environmental education. Each participant understood the importance of environmental education as well as the constraints of the school system.

The group chose to develop a curriculum that helps teachers introduce environmental information into their pre-existing subject areas. For instance, a second grade music class might learn a song about trees; a fourth grade French class might discuss and write essays about deforestation or soil conservation. A fifth grade geography class might



Photo by Denise Mortimer

*A Malian woman sifts millet.*

write a report about cotton growing and its environmental effects, while a science class might plant trees and observe their growth. This approach enables teachers to provide environmental education without creating additional class work or compromising the standard curriculum.

Workshop leader Ndayitwayeko reports that the participants are proud of the new curriculum and believe its practicality will help inspire other environmental initiatives as well.

## "What Do We Not Know About Water?"

Paulina Espinosa

This provocative headline in *El Diario de Hoy* led a story on GreenCOM's recent study on water in rural El Salvador.

Picked up by much of the country's media, the study examines the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of rural residents toward water. Through interviewing members of 2,125 households, researchers found that:

- ▶ Many rural women and girls walk hours just to obtain water: up to nearly five and a half hours a day.

- ▶ Many people are unaware that their water supplies are contaminated or diminishing.
- ▶ 79 percent of respondents said their water quality is good because the water is clear.

According to Jose Ignacio Mata, GreenCOM Resident Director, Salvadorans now accept water scarcity as the norm. The good news, is that more than half the respondents said they are willing to participate in programs to improve water supply, quality, and access.

The survey was designed to help meet USAID/El Salvador's Strategic Objective No. 4: increase access to good water in rural areas. The data will help shape interventions and serve as a baseline for study.



*This report uses a tabloid format and cost-minimizing production methods. It is printed on recycled, post-consumer waste paper and was produced entirely in-house at AED using desktop-publishing software and photocopying equipment.*

## Kudos in El Salvador

On June 30, the Central American Commission for Environment and Development transferred its presidency to San Salvador. During the accompanying celebrations, the president of El Salvador thanked GreenCOM for its excellent work. GreenCOM materials were featured prominently during the accompanying celebrations.

In addition, El Salvador's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources presented a certificate of appreciation to Academy for Educational Development President, Stephen Moseley, during the third annual National Environmental Journalism Awards ceremony. GreenCOM initiated the Awards in 1995, and has helped institutionalize them. The Awards in turn have helped boost environmental media coverage and thus environmental awareness to unprecedented levels—although much remains to be done (see “What Do Not We Know About Water?” in this issue).

In recent years, the major national newspapers have begun to include two or three environmental stories daily; they published full-color tabloid inserts of environmental reporting on World Environment Day, June 5. The cash prizes are contributed by private corporations.



*Left to right: Jose Ignacio Mata, Resident Advisor for GreenCOM-El Salvador; Stephen M. Moseley, President, AED; Miguel Araujo, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, El Salvador.*

## Nepalese Forests: The Docudrama

Julie Chernov

Forty years ago, the Nepalese government passed a law nationalizing the country's forests. Massive deforestation followed. To stem the damage, the legislature enacted community forest

laws in 1993. The government gave villages land, seedlings and technical assistance for reforestation; the villagers could reap the benefits their trees provided.

GreenCOM/Nepal, in partnership with Himalaya films, has created a “docudrama” to promote forest awareness in rural areas and facilitate a dialogue between policy makers and forest users. As part of the mobile video program, it will be shown to rural villagers as well as government officials.

The setting and problems featured in the piece are genuine, and all actors but the four leads are local villagers. In the story, two couples are excluded from a community forest project because they have no money to invest in it. One of the men disapproves of his wife's literacy classes—until her illiteracy causes her to misplace an important letter, jeopardizing their chances of joining the forest project.

When work on the docudrama began, the participants said they hoped the video would teach two lessons: 1) that people can solve their problems themselves, and 2) that the communities receiving forest land should include everyone in the forestry projects, regardless of ability to pay. According to producer Kedar Sharma, the docudrama has already succeeded beyond expectations in creating a dialogue between villagers and policy makers.

## Water Kids in the Middle East

Mary Sebold

What does a summer camp in Oman have in common with a children's television series in Israel? The answer is water conservation. As part of GreenCOM's second Middle East Peace Process initiative, Oman and Israel will produce videos that encourage young people to use water efficiently. In March, these two countries and representatives from Jordan, Tunisia, and the West Bank/Gaza met in Athens at a technical workshop of the Multilateral Working Group on Water Resources of the Peace Process. All agreed that by targeting children and adolescents, knowledge and practices concerning wise water use would spread through families more quickly than by focusing on older audiences. Summer camps and television were two ways suggested to involve the younger set.

For two years, Oman has organized a summer Youth Work Camp where young people ages 12 to 18

help government employees repair springs, dams, and the *aflaj*—the elaborate traditional water distribution system. Teenagers learn the importance of natural water resources and share experiences with peers from other parts of the country. This year, the Omanis will film the camp and show younger children that they, too, can help conserve water.

While junior engineers work in Oman, budding actors will train in Israel. For the first time, the Israeli Water Commission will design a campaign for and by children with the help of the Children's Channel. Live from a different town each week, up to ten shows will feature wise water use in an entertaining, informative way. For instance, a sheriff will enforce water efficiency in one episode patterned after the American western. The Commission expects thousands of children to attend each program and even more to watch at home. There will be prizes and special activities for viewers far away. Parts of this series, and the video from Oman, will contribute to a regional videotape that GreenCOM will release on World Water Day 1999. In this way, GreenCOM and its partners hope to increase

awareness of water conservation practices and foster peace.

## Living in Log Cabins, Learning on Computers: Russia GLOBE

Peter Spain

In June I traveled to the Perm region, 800 miles northeast of Moscow, to visit some of the schools participating in the Russian outpost of GLOBE—Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment. GreenCOM has helped outfit five GLOBE schools in and around Perm; another twelve are due to join the network this fall. The regional coordinator and driving force is Victor Misenzhnikov, director of the Perm State University Teacher Training Center.

In the schools we visited, the students' excitement and pride in their GLOBE work was immediately evident. Students showed us their datasets and reports, and demonstrated how they took measurements. The Tchaikovskaya school, for instance, uses temperature and rainfall gauges outside. Students measure soil moisture and ground cover on a ten-meter square of land, and track ground cover and tree growth on a nearby wooded lot.

Although they record the data on the computer, most of the schools lack Internet access because of



Photo by Peter Spain

*Russian GLOBE students test water quality.*

a dearth of funds and/or phone lines. Students record measurements instead on floppy disks, and Misenzhnikov transmits them to GLOBE in the U.S. from his computer in Perm.

The rural schools where GLOBE has taken root are in the real Russia, representing not Moscow and St. Petersburg but the vastness of the country and the struggle that transformation is causing. Many of the teachers, like most public employees, had not been paid in months. Because of the shortage of cash, all the homes—mostly log cabins—have gardens outside, some with plastic greenhouses, to take advantage of the short growing season and ensure food through the winter.

Environmentalism is still a new concept here; no one—including the head of the Perm Region environmental committee—seemed concerned about the oily smell coming from nearby refineries. Despite all, the enthusiasm in the students' eyes are a tribute to the potential GLOBE has begun to tap.

## Engaging the Media in Tanzania

Brian Day

More than thirty journalists spent a day learning about coastal management in Tanzania in May. GreenCOM, together with counterparts for the Government of Tanzania and the University of Rhode Island's Coastal Resource Center, organized the workshop to introduce journalists to key players and issues in coastal management. The Journalists Environmental Association of Tanzania (JET) played a large role in the seminar as well.

Journalists are often too rushed to understand the complexities of environmental issues, let alone explain them to the public.

This workshop offered participants a time-efficient opportunity to make valuable contacts and as well as get vital background information.

The Tanzanian Mission's strategic objective on natural resources is multifaceted; GreenCOM is working with educators and journalists to enlist the interest, support and behavior change necessary to improve natural resource management and meet the needs of local people.

## Home Office News

In June, Denise Mortimer joined GreenCOM as a program associate. Mortimer recently completed a six-month internship at the National Wildlife Federation. As a Peace Corps Volunteer in Mali, she encouraged people in her village of 150 to adopt more environmentally sustainable practices in farming and forest use. She launched an environmental education program at a local school, organized a village women's association, and taught people how to build wood-efficient mud stoves. Before Peace Corps, Mortimer spent a year as chef at a safari lodge in

Namibia. She also tended the game farm's semi-tame menagerie: a cheetah, warthog family and baby ostriches.

## Visitors

GreenCOM welcomed Luis Mattos, director of GRUDE, the Brazilian Ecology Defense Group. Mattos was particularly interested in the materials GreenCOM has produced in El Salvador.

## GreenCOM Staff

Rick Bossi	Latin America Coordinator
Bruce Clark	Financial
Manager	
Brian A. Day	Project Director
Carole Douglass	Resource Center Director
Paulina Espinosa	Program Associate
Krishna Gautam	Nepal Country Coordinator
Mona Grieser	Senior EE&C Specialist
Richard Grieser	Mali Resident Advisor
Cheryl Groff	Egypt Resident Advisor
Orlando Hernández, Ph.D.	Applied Research Director
José Ignacio Mata	El Salvador Resident Advisor
Susan Middlestadt, Ph.D.	Senior Research Advisor
Denise Mortimer	Program Associate
Peggy Preusch	Program Associate
Maritza Rivera	Environmental Interpretation Specialist,
Nicaragua	
Reva Schwartz	Research Analyst
Mary Sebold	Program Officer
Peter Spain	Administrative Director
Peter Templeton	Field Support Specialist
Mona Toubour	Financial Associate
Julietta Varron	Nicaragua Resident Advisor

### Contacting GreenCOM

Tel: (202) 884-8700

Fax: (202) 884-8997

Email: [greencom@aed.org](mailto:greencom@aed.org)

Internet: <http://www.info.usaid.gov/environment/greencom/>



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Academy for Educational  
Development  
1255 23rd St. NW  
Washington, DC 20037

**GreenCOM**